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AUTHOR Thurston, Paul; Clauss, Joanne
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ABSTRACT

Justification for school district consolidation is made on the basis of either reducing cost or increasing educational quality. Some cost reduction may be realized through certain economies of scale in some consolidations but it is by no means automatic. The Illinois State Board of Education emphasizes the relationship between high school size and program offering, school size and student achievement, and school size and the number of planning preparations by teachers as the primary rationale for encouraging school consolidation. In scrutinizing the relationship between school size and quality, however, the consolidation movement should probe fundamental questions regarding the economic and quality-of-life relationship between schools and rural communities, factors important in providing quality education (including richness of curriculum, quality of teachers, and parochialism among students) and their relationship to school size, and the vision of quality education in rural schools. Strategies that should be utilized in consolidation planning are sharing of students or teachers between buildings, utilizing instructional technology, restucturing high school grades, reexamining course scheduling, and examining regional/state initiatives. Issues that should be considered in implementing consolidation include deemphasizing bureaucratic aspects, consolidating across regions, maximizing teacher quality, providing transitions for participation in extracurricular activities, and supporting schools during and after consolidation. (NEC)

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CPR FOR RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS:
Emerging Alternatives in Curriculum, Program and Reorganization

Paul Thurston and Joanne Clauss

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CPR FOR RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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A Summary

Justification for school district consolidation is made on the basis of either reducing cost or increasing educational quality. Some cost reduction may be realized through certain economies of scale in some consolidations but it is by no means automatic. The prevalent attitude about the financial factor seems to be that if consolidation does not occur small school districts will receive less money from the state aid formula. The state board of education emphasizes the relationship between school size and student achievement as the primary rationale for encouraging school consolidation.

Because of doubts about the methodological soundness of the study the consolidation movement would be better served by a closer scrutiny of the relationship between school size and school quality. This examination would suggest certain fundamental questions that deserve probing.

1. What is the economic relationship and the quality-of-life relationship between the school and the rural community?
2. What factors seem to be important in providing a quality education, and how does school size relate to them?
3. What is the vision of quality education in rural schools?

Once these questions are asked it is possible to consider a variety of organizational responses--including consolidation--which could lead to improved schools.

Finally, there are certain actions the state board can undertake to maximize the possibility of getting meaningful reforms out of the school reorganization committees.

CPR For Rural School Districts: Emerging Alternatives

In Curriculum, Program and Reorganization*

by Paul W. Thurston and Joanne Clauss+

Justification for school district consolidation is made on the basis of either reducing cost or increasing educational quality. Some cost reduction may be realized through certain economies of scale in some consolidations; but cost reduction is by no means assured by consolidation. In fact, if one looks at some of the important variables there will most likely be savings in some areas and additional costs in other areas. One area in which there is most likely to be some cost savings is in personnel. With 75-85 or even 90% of the educational fund costs tied to teachers' salaries, a reduction in the number of teachers through consolidation is very likely the most significant area of realizing some savings. This would occur at the high school level where you might be able to eliminate one of two teachers who specialize in the same area and could easily handle larger class sizes. There is also some likely cost savings even for elementary teachers where classes can be made somewhat larger because of the larger pool of students. In addition, there may be some administrative savings,

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+In addition to the bibliographical work that has gone into this paper we have been generously assisted in interviews with superintendents and board members. Larry Jacobsen, superintendent in Macon, Illinois, Mark Gregory, superintendent in Moweaqua, Illinois, Roger Neil and David Bills, superintendent and high school principal, respectively, at Niantic-Harristown, Mike Francis, superintendent of Illiopolis, Calvin Jackson, superintendent of Prairie Central and Cindy Helmers and Jim Paternoster, board members of Prairie Central School District, have all shared their considerable expertise with us. A colleague, Gordon Hoke, has also been very generous with his time and insights about schools, economic vitality, and consolidation. Still, with all this assistance, the authors are responsible for the contents of this paper.

but probably less than people expect. There is a heavy workload on administrators, that workload increases in Illinois with Senate Bill 730 responsibilities, and districts are going to need to have administrators available who can handle these new responsibilities.

In many school districts there is a considerable expenditure for energy because of inefficient buildings and rising energy costs. So it is possible consolidation might realize some energy savings through selective closing of inefficient buildings.

It is necessary for us to view how existing buildings will be used in the consolidation process. This won't be a consolidation like Olympia's where a magnificent large high school was constructed in the corn fields as a way of avoiding a decision about which of several small towns to locate the school. It is unlikely that you will see as much, if any, of this type of new school building. Certainly new buildings cannot be included under the rationale of cost savings for consolidation. Additionally, as consolidation involves greater transportation, there will be greater transportation costs because of the need to buy new buses, increased fuel and upkeep costs, and increased bus driver personnel costs.

Vision of the cost savings in consolidation will involve no new building. Olympia is not the model for consolidation in 1985. But rather a flexible use of many of the buildings now being used is a cornerstone to the current consolidation movement. The possibility, for example, of a high school which utilizes several different buildings, with students moving between buildings on different days is intriguing. This has powerful implications for the way classes are scheduled and students spend their time; but this may be necessary if cost savings are to be realized. This may well mean an improvement in curriculum and the instructional program.

The amount and the extent of savings will depend on the particular facts and will differ rather markedly, we suspect, from district to district. There may well be some savings, but it is important to be careful not to oversell this aspect of the school consolidation incentive. At the current time in Illinois the concern for greater efficiency does not seem to be the driving force behind consolidation. There is an economic or financial factor that is fueling consolidation--in many districts citizens cannot and will not support new taxes. It is more thinkable now to give up local school districts to get out from underneath much of this financial burden, although it is not well articulated how this will take place.

The Illinois State Board of Education seems to be most interested in the second supporting rationale for school consolidation, namely that a better educational program can be provided at the same or less cost if school districts are increased in size. This argument is provided in the May 1985 report, School District Organization in Illinois, and the June 1985 report, Student Achievement in Illinois: An Analysis of Student Progress, the data for which is the basis of much of the school district organization report. The central arguments for urging school district reorganization in Illinois are based upon a relationship between high school size and program offerings, school size and student achievement, and school size and number of planning preparations by teacher. Let us briefly review the highlights of each of these three major arguments. First, the report emphasizes the relationship between high school size and program offerings.

> Evidence from these surveys (known as the census of secondary school course offerings) showed very clearly that opportunity to learn is measured by the number of courses available in the curriculum, the existence of relevant courses, and the proportion of students to whom instruction is delivered in the various subject areas is related to the size of high schools, with small high schools providing a significantly more narrow range of course offerings. [School District Organization, p. 10]

The report then goes on to elaborate that the number of course offerings includes advanced or sequential course offerings as well as remedial offerings.

The second, and probably most significant, finding links high school size and student achievement. The high schools are broken into four quartiles with size in these quartiles ranging from 1 to 214 students in the first quartile, 215 to 493 students in the second quartile, 494 to 1,279 students in the third quartile, and schools in the fourth quartile with 1,280 or more students. The report first links the relationship between school size in one of these four quartiles with the mean achievement levels of eleventh grade students according to results of the Illinois Inventory of Educational Progress. The report then quotes the findings from this correlation.

> The analysis indicated significant differences between schools with 214 students or less (size 1) and 1,280 or more (size 4) from the schools containing 215 through 1,279 students. The lowest achievement was found in mathematics, geometry, and reading in schools with less than 215 students. In all curriculum areas the highest achievement was found in schools with 449 to 1,279 students. These school size results were apparent even after controlling for school economic status and courses offered. [School District Organization, p. 18]

This study also correlated school size with results on the ACT tests. Results of this correlation were reported the following way.

> The mean achievement displayed in Table 12 indicates that there was significantly lower performance in schools containing 214 or fewer or 1,280 or more students in English, Social Science, and Natural Science. The higher level of achievement in each subject area was noted for schools containing 494 to 1,279 students. (In no subject area did schools with 214 or fewer students score as well as schools with 215 to 1,279 students.) [School District Organization, emphasis in original, p. 23]

Lastly, the report emphasizes the correlation between high school size and number of planning preparations by teacher. This correlation is elaborated in the study in this way.

> Generally such planning preparations are determined in relation to the number of different subjects or courses taught and do not include the additional planning which might be necessary to accommodate student grouping differences in the same subject area. Although the number of planning preparations does not necessarily affect the quality of the program, it is generally believed that the greater the number of preparations (and therefore more subject areas taught), the less likely that the teacher will be able to teach them all equally well . . . Information from a sample of schools surveyed in the State Board of Education Census of Secondary School Course Offerings indicates that there is a strong relationship between the proportion of teachers with multiple preparations and the size of the high school. [School District Organization, p. 27]

Certain very important methodological questions exist about this study and the accuracy of the conclusions that are drawn by it. Lloyd Humphreys, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, has done a critique of the data and research methodology behind this school district organization report and is categorically critical of this research. The bases of the criticism are basically threefold.

First, a very serious question exists about the causal relationship the report makes between school size and school quality. There is a very strong implication from the study that relations or correlations exist between school size and other factors such as student achievement which are causal. Yet inadequate controls were made in the research to cover critical non-school variables such as race and socioeconomic status. Humphreys elaborates upon this particular causal factor.

> The authors drew conclusions about a causal relation between school size and academic achievement in the absence of even partially adequate controls over differences in the academic achievement of students that schools cannot control. The authors use to measure what they call the socioeconomic status of the schools as the control but this measure is not minimally adequate if used in the only reasonable manner . . . The socioeconomic status of the school is defined in the report as the number of free lunches to which the students in the school are entitled under the federal program. To make any sense at all, the variables should have been defined as the proportion of

> students in the school so entitled. Number of lunches is highly confounded with school size. Of course it is possible that someone caught this error before the statistical analyses were done. If the error were caught, the free lunch variable would still not qualify as minimally adequate. Education and occupation of the parents are more adequate controls. Race and ethnicity are also necessary controls. One does not need to conclude that academic ability is highly heritable to make these recommendations concerning controls. The point is that schools have little influence on home environments. (Humphreys, pp. 1-2)

There is a second concern in the research about the high degree of relationship between many of the variables and school size. For example, school size and number of courses offered and school size and number of planning preparations for teachers involves a very high degree of relationship. The effect of such a high degree of relationship, its collinearity, makes the results statistically untrustworthy.

And, finally, the determination of the meanings to be given to the numbers which bound the school size are not adequately explained. The numbers are simply the description of the way the quartiles come out. But what would happen if the research had been divided into thirds or fifths or sixths? This is just another way of saying that there is a grave suspicion about what the meaningful relationship is between size and quality of education.

In 1976 Jonathon Sher, writing in a National Institute of Education report on Economy, Efficiency, and Equality, the Myths of Rural School and District Consolidation, wrote the following about the school research supporting consolidation.

> Given the enthusiasm with which consolidation was advocated, one would expect the empirical evidence supporting this policy to be overwhelming. It is not. The evidence on consolidation is incomplete. Most of the research not only fails to document the alleged benefits of consolidation, but also fails to acknowledge potential liabilities or problems. With rare exceptions, this body of research is methodologically unsound, with almost every study open to criticism severe and significant enough to make the findings extremely suspect. The conclusions are, at best,

> inconclusive, and at worst, simply incorrect. In short, there is no strong empirical base to support the assumptions and assertions of school and district consolidation advocates. (Sher, 1976, p. 27)

With school consolidation committees being finalized, it does not seem an appropriate time for a more elaborate academic exchange about the methodology used in these state board of education reports. The discrediting of the research behind this study will not change the consolidation legislation nor dampen very much the public willingness to consider school consolidation as a possibility. Yet it is important to shape the discussion, the agenda for discussion, and possible educational changes involved in school consolidation. The Illinois State Board of Education, in our view, makes a serious mistake in placing the initiative for school consolidation on such a mechanistic notion that a certain school or district size will create better education. The legislation states a preference for unit districts and also sets a minimum enrollment of 1500 students in unit districts, 1000 students in elementary districts, and 500 in high school districts as the preferred minimal size. This does the general topic a disservice. We can do better than this. We can talk about educational quality, and what structural changes might lead to increased prospects for real educational reform in small school districts.

I. SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION IN ILLINOIS

Public debate about school consolidation will continue, because it is mandated statutorily and, more significantly, because people in small rural schools are willing to talk about it in a way that did not exist just a short time ago. This discussion will need to go well beyond the simple numerical formula which is suggested in the state board study. For meaningful, significant educational reform to take place through this consolidation

process the questions need to be expanded. The consolidation committees will need to do more than simply redraw boundaries to apportion the right number of students to each district. Rather, more fundamental questions need to be raised about the educational characteristics of schools in rural and small town Illinois. This section will be divided along two very different themes, educational aspirations of the small school and the relationship between the small school and the community or area in which it resides.

A. What educational aspirations do we have for schools in rural, small town Illinois? Do these aspirations differ from what we have for schools in the suburban, urban areas? Certainly the state board of education does not suggest the possibility that advantages might exist if schools were different, and one important difference might be premised upon the size of the school. It is possible, of course, that such a well articulated rationale may exist for some small schools. But we rather suspect that schools tend to be very similar in their organization, administrative structure and use of time, and that differences are more haphazard than a statement of any particular philosophy.

1. What are the real or perceived shortcomings of small schools that are a function of their size? We certainly do not know what all of these might be, but there are three that receive recurring attention: richness of curriculum, quality of teachers and parochialism among the students. Let's consider each of these in somewhat more detail.

Richness of curriculum does not solely involve an analysis of the number of courses offered. On one level it involves a question of broad program alternatives such as an academic orientation as contrasted with a career orientation. And within the academic orientation there is the matter

of breadth of course coverage available through the basic discipline areas, including foreign languages, sciences and the arts. At a higher level there is a question about the substantive quality of these offerings which is very difficult to ascertain, and in reality probably has very great divergence from one small school to another.

Teacher quality is another factor which is very important, probably the most important variable, and for which there is tremendous variability between districts. Again this is a factor that is very hard to measure, but one that is important and one that can be inquired into by looking at the teacher's preparation and education, area of coverage the teacher is expected to have and the reports of the teacher's performance.

Finally, the size of the student body can be important in providing the right mix for an environment conducive to learning. The peer group can be so small that there is a type of isolationism which acts as a barrier to anything new. More importantly, probably, is the social system that can develop where students do not have enough new environments in which to challenge their self-view or put them into contact with other very bright students which might prod them into greater academic effort. These are three areas in which school consolidation committees might examine when wrestling with proposals.

2. What is the educational vision about what rural schools can be or ought to be? This is an important question which is glaring by its absence. Although we do not profess to be able to provide a definitive answer there are several factors which ought to be included in any answer. First, the school program ought to provide some real choices for students and encourage students to work at their own potential. Real choices at the high school level, for example, would include some vocational courses

as well as academic courses. And students should not be limited by the particular grade level they are in. There should be opportunities for students to move where the material and skill level are appropriate for them. This is, in a sense, consistent with the tradition of one room school houses where the program had to be individualized by necessity. This same spirit ought to be kept alive in the larger school setting.

Second, there ought to be an intellectual vitality in the school. This intellectual vitality, or even an absence of anti-intellectualism, does not have to be in conflict with the values of small town and rural Illinois. In fact, one of the important changes in rural Illinois during the past 25 years is the increasing cosmopolitan ties which many rural families have. Their horizons go well beyond the nearest small town. The schools in these communities need to believe and convey the sense that math, science, arts, reading and much more are important. People who reside in small towns and rural areas certainly understand the breadth and significance of the world, and how our attention has to go beyond narrow parochial matters. Small town, rural life and the schooling that goes on there should be compatible with a perspective of international interdependence. And this education is compatible with--not subservient to--a religious view of life.

Third, because of the structural and organizational adjustments which may have to be made to reorganize school districts in a way that saves money there is a possibility of experimenting with the way students learn. It is possible that students can become increasingly self-reliant for their own learning with a deemphasis upon the traditional teacher centered classroom. It is this arena where the ideas of Sizer in Horace's Compromise might be most meaningfully explored. Independent study

would be an important part of the curriculum. The knowledge gained here would be exportable to larger school districts.

B. A second major theme which merits close attention is the relationship between the school and the community. Schools can become quite closely associated, even identified, with the towns in which they are located. How important are the economic and psychological relationships that exist between the school and the town? We are able to do little more than ask these important questions. It does seem clear that the economic vitality of many small towns has been sapped, and that the interstates and large shopping centers many miles away have made many of these towns obsolete. High schools ought not be kept in towns simply as a pretense that the towns are still economically viable or because they provide one of the last sources of employment.

The psychological ties between the school and town can be very great, and has a significance to the school and the town which ought not to be overlooked. The pride which town members feel about the successful athletic exploits of the high school teams is just one example. Beyond this several generations may be linked to the school, and students receive an important nurturing which comes as part of being linked to the larger community. These ties, among other things, provide an important reason for trying to maintain elementary centers in towns. These elementary schools can provide an important function for the community which goes beyond its narrow educational charge. These schools can be a focal point for many people in the community. They might provide use of facilities and some program offerings for the community at large that would not otherwise be available. Schools could provide a service like many park districts provide in larger communities. This could enrich the quality of

life in these towns, improve the relations between schools and communities and broaden the support base.

Finally, more attention could be given to thinking about how schooling might enhance economic development. In an article with the provocative title of "Something Old, Something New: The Wedding of Rural Education and Rural Development" Stuart Rosenfeld argues that rural schools ought not mimic urban schools by providing industry-oriented vocational education centers. Rather, he argues that entrepreneurial education may be appropriate.

> Instead of catering to the large firms and high-tech companies that are expected to dominate the US economy in the future, rural educators might be wiser to focus on small-scale entrepreneurs (exemplified by family farmers), supporting this focus with the same kind of high school education that helped transform US agriculture into one of the most efficient industries in the world. For future rural development, vocational agriculture, cooperatives, and small-scale entrepreneurship may be better models than trade and industrial programs and textile plants . . . I do not mean to suggest a wholesale return to vocational agriculture for rural youths--but rather an increased appreciation of the entrepreneurial values and skills that such programs provided. [Rosenfeld, 1983, p. 271]

The predicament that Caterpillar finds itself in and the impact of its decline on the employment of thousands of people, many of whom live in rural areas, raises important questions about what the curriculum of schools will be and how it will relate to the economic vitality of the community as well as the economic prospects of its graduates.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES OR ARRANGEMENTS WHICH MIGHT EXPEDITE THE CONSOLIDATION PROCESS

A theme which has run throughout this paper has been that consolidation ought to be viewed quite broadly. It is not a simple numbers game of drawing larger boundaries around the school district and deciding where to put the elementary school and the junior/senior high school.

Constraints of travel distance and availability of buildings may not make this possible. Consequently, attention needs to be given to alternative structures or strategies that can provide a quality education with a somewhat different delivery system. Following are a few structures or strategies that might be utilized in consolidation planning.

A. Sharing of students or teachers between buildings. It is probably preferable if elementary schools can stay in their current locations, particularly if the physical plants are viable. There may be some specialists which can be shared between buildings. Middle school and senior high school students can be bused further distances, but it may be preferable to have high school students located at more than one site. Then it would be possible for teachers and/or students to move between sites for particular programs. Some of this is already going on in small districts, and could be utilized in school consolidation.

Sharing teachers or sharing students across district boundaries has improved curriculum for some districts who have taken advantage of these innovative educational concepts. Macon County has two sets of school districts that have tried new concepts in order to upgrade their curriculum.

For two years the districts of Macon and Moweaqua in southern Macon County have shared students. The first two periods of the day are exchange periods. Moweaqua does all of the transporting of children for both districts. Bus time is approximately ten minutes between the two communities.

Class period times for the two districts do not coincide. Moweaqua starts the day at 8:05 with an early bird period. Shorthand, Art I, Foods I, and Ag. Mechanics/Repair are the only classes offered that period at

Moweaqua. These classes are shared by students from both districts. All Moweaqua students report at 8:50 for Period 1. The second shared period at Moweaqua include Art II, Adult Living/Parenting, and Basic Agriculture runs from 9:12-9:57.

School for all students starts at 8:10 in Macon. Classes shared by students from both districts for two periods are Spanish II, III, and IV, Physics, and Industrial Arts.

The sharing of students has broadened curriculums for both schools and the addition of more students per class has reduced the need to possibly rif some of the teaching staff. Because the foods class is held in Moweaqua, there is no need to maintain a home ec./kitchen classroom in Macon. Moweaqua also has facilities for the art program. Macon in turn maintains the industrial arts program. The art teacher teaches Spanish I at Moweaqua. Spanish II, III, and IV are taught by a specialist at Macon. Shorthand, a highly specialized subject area, is taught in only one district.

In the northwestern part of Macon County Niantic-Harristown and Illiopolis are sharing both teachers and a few students for a computer science course. The last two periods of the day teachers are exchanged for math and industrial arts. Students were sent to Niantic-Harristown from Illiopolis for a computer science course for the 84-85 school year. The teacher sharing concept among rural districts is not as innovative as the student exchange. Because of the cost of maintaining equipment and facilities for some of the specialized courses, it may be less expensive to transport students than exchange teaching staff.

A unique student exchange has been going on in east central Illinois for a number of years between Hoopeston-East Lynn and Rossville. The

program started as an exchange for vocational subjects but has expanded to academic areas as well. Two shuttle buses, one from each district, exchange students every period of the day. The distance between districts is seven miles. Rossville, the smaller of the two districts, has facilities for agricultural mechanics and industrial arts. Some students from H-EL also go to Rossville for shorthand. Any class not offered at Rossville that will fit into the schedule of a student at Rossville may be taken at Hoopeston. Several students from Rossville go to Hoopeston-East Lynn for Spanish. There is no tuition charged between the districts.

Superintendent Roger Neil at Niantic-Harristown and Mike Francis at Illiopolis expressed concern about the low number of course offerings in their high school for students that are non-college bound. They felt that students taking a core curriculum were receiving more than an adequate education. Even though both districts send 40-50 percent of their juniors and seniors to the Decatur Area Vocational Center, the course offerings to underclassmen in the non-college bound curriculum are limited. Illiopolis cannot afford to offer computer programming, creative arts, industrial arts, or agricultural programs. One year of Spanish is the only foreign language available. There is no band. The only exposure to music is one period of chorus.

This fall Prairie Central began to function as a new unit district. Prairie Central is a reorganization/consolidation of Fairbury-Cropsey, Forrest-Strawn-Wing, and Chatsworth. Each community will maintain its elementary school. The junior high will be at Forrest and the senior high at Fairbury. No new buildings were built. By combining these three districts, the curriculum at the high school was revised, improved and expanded. All areas of the curriculum were upgraded and a reduction in

the number of teaching staff was made. The following is a break out of the expanded curriculum at Prairie Central for the 1985-86 school year.

English--English III and IV were revised to offer ten semester courses in two groups. Students must choose options from each group.
Group A--American Literature, Modern Literature, Novels/Short Stories, European Literature, Drama
Group B--Advanced Composition, Journalism, Speech, Creative Writing, Communication III

Math--Two courses added: Calculus, Statistics/Probability

Science--Reduced Anatomy/Physiology to a semester course and added two semester courses: Advanced Chemistry, Environmental Education

History--Two courses added: World Geography and World Problems

Foreign Language--Add Spanish IV and French I, II, III, IV

Business--Add two semester courses: Business Law, Merchandising

Computer Science--Add three semester courses: Basic Programming I, Basic Programming II, Advanced Programming

Agriculture--Revise program to eleven semester course offerings

Industrial Arts--Revise program to eleven semester course offerings

Home Economics--Add one semester course: Living environment

Art--Revise one year course to six semester course offerings: Drawing and Design, Drawing and Painting, Art Crafts, Ceramics and Sculpture, Art Communications, Advanced Art

Music--Add one semester course: Music Appreciation

Distance between existing districts will be a major factor in considering school district reorganization. Of course, there are some districts classified as "necessarily small school districts" as spelled out in the Illinois School Finance Project that will not be able to organize with minimal numbers of students (3, p. 90). With an increasing demand for high level English, math, science, humanities, and foreign language, it may become reasonable to have high school students at two sights in one district. One campus would house grades 9-10. Another campus would house grades

11-12. The last two years of high school would provide a curriculum of concentrated academic courses or specialized vocational courses. There appears to be a natural split in the maturation level between these groups making a dual high school a highly feasible concept.

B. Instructional technology is very sophisticated and there are significant materials available which could play a central role in the instructional program. Computers, movies, videotapes of television programs and a wide range of audio tapes can be utilized very effectively. These not only supplement the teacher and textbook but also allow a flexibility of use that is attractive. Schools generally have not used this technology as effectively as it could be used, but the flexibility it allows might be a needed incentive for it to be used and work well.

C. Different Structure of the High School

The current organization of the high school with students in grades 9-12 with a small peer group may not be sufficiently challenging the last year or two. A clearer delineation between the 9th and 10th grades and the 11th and 12th grades might be one way to enhance the 11th and 12th grade curriculum. At this 11th and 12th grade level students may need to make a clearer commitment to a vocational or academic program. Also, community college courses could be used more extensively and systematically to insure the appropriate richness of the curriculum.

D. Reexamination of Course Scheduling

Traveling long distances to school by bus is costly both to the district and to the students who lose time which could be more productively spent on other matters. The lock step, seven or eight period day with each course meeting every day may not be feasible or optimal for consolidated high schools. Courses may need to be scheduled in longer

time blocks and meet only once or twice per week. Students may have some longer blocks of discretionary time for studying or working on special independent projects. There will also need to be some consideration given to classes possibly running later or maybe even having certain courses meet Saturday morning. The precise schedule may have to differ from district to district. Scheduling may be one of the most important variables that school districts can control when they think of implementing consolidation. It would be unfortunate if schools limited their thinking about school structure to the traditional schedule.

E. Regional and/or state initiatives

Regional and/or state initiatives could be instrumental in supporting education in consolidated districts. These organizational levels could provide important services that small districts are often not able to provide themselves. It may well be that the value of teacher supervision for improving instruction is over rated, at least to the extent it is done by a building or district administration. Time could be beneficially spent with greater emphasis on curriculum objectives, materials used and interrelation between subjects. The state or regional office is in a good position to encourage the networking of people in academic disciplines across district lines. Attention could be given to curriculum articulation, materials development and distribution. Potentially difficult questions of turf and responsibilities would need to be worked out, but involvement at the regional or state level of some of these discretionary programs could have an important impact on teacher performance.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONSOLIDATION STATUTE

With the passage of H.B. 730 the consolidation legislation is in place, and although additional rules and regulations may be written by the state

board, the timeline and structure for making the consolidation recommendation to the voters is in place. Upon careful review of the legislation we do not want to sound too presumptuous in suggesting several matters that the state board may want to consider in implementing consolidation.

A. Deemphasize the Bureaucratic Aspects of the Process and Take a More Interactive, Negotiated Approach

The statute takes a bureaucratic approach to the problem. Educational service region reorganization committees will make recommendations for consolidation to the state committee (the State Board of Education). If the state committee disapproves the report can be sent back to the regional committee for revisions. Clearly the state committee has the authority for placing a responsible proposal before the voters. But, practically speaking, those proposals having the best chance of being approved are those that are supported at both the state and regional levels. Therefore, it would seem highly desirable for at least one state level staff member to work closely with an area reorganization committee. (It might even be desirable for state board members to take greater responsibility for particular regions, working with the regions long before the regional report is written and approved.) There can be discussions about many of the important variables involved in consolidation before positions become too firmly set. This dialog early in the process may be more time consuming, but it should make it move more smoothly at the approval stage of the process.

This interaction or negotiation can be important in seeing what financial assistance, if any, might be helpful from the state. Also the interaction can help guide the appropriate setting of the tax rate, to the extent flexibility exists in this area. This interactive process can also introduce some alternatives into the discussion before things move too far.

B. Consolidation Across Regions

There will be a tendency for the regional committees to focus on the particular region, and this may make it more difficult for consolidations to materialize where they cut across regions. The state board ought to be involved quite early in identifying those potential consolidations that cut across regions, and communicate clearly to the regions how this will be handled. Minimize the turf protection tendencies in this area very early.

C. Maximize Teacher Quality

The state board needs to clearly go on record, probably on the basis of legislation that will need to be approved, that where teacher reduction is necessary in a consolidation that it will be done on the basis of teacher quality, not solely on the basis of seniority. The selection can be done by a neutral committee which can be made up of teachers from outside of the district as well as others. The impact of probable teacher reductions should be softened with money for severance pay or early retirement. It is important that the state board confront possible perceived differences in teacher quality between districts, and that teacher quality be explicitly stated as an important factor in the redefined school districts.

D. Participation in extra curricular activities is a very important part of school life, particularly at the high school. Therefore the stance or posture which IHSA takes toward this can have an important relationship to the transition toward larger, different school districts. There will need to be direct, high level negotiations with IHSA which will ease, accommodate this transition rather than allow IHSA to undermine desirable organizational reforms because of a particular view, for example, of how the school football playoffs ought to be organized. This negotiation with IHSA will become even more critical if different structures are introduced, for example students taking some junior college courses or students

attending courses across different buildings. IHSA will likely be very cooperative, but it will be important to involve it quite early in the process. If it should prove necessary legislation could be sought in the area of athletic control.

E. Do Not Forget About These Schools

The timeline is tight, and many school consolidation elections will take place in April 1987 to be implemented July 1, 1988. The state board will have to be supportive during this transition, and ought to provide special types of services either through the state or regional offices after the consolidations. The state ought to be attentive to any innovative educational programs which come out of these consolidation proposals, nurture them and disseminate information about them to other districts.

CONCLUSION

School consolidation is an important part of the reform package. It is a reform that has significant implications for how schooling is conducted in small towns and rural areas of Illinois as well as having implications for the communities themselves. It is too important a matter to treat simply as a mechanical exercise which involves the redrawing of school district boundaries to get more students placed into larger attendance centers. There are important issues of educational quality and life in rural Illinois wrapped up that deserve careful attention.

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